

INDUSTRY GUIDANCE FOR SAFELY REOPENING: CHARTER & LAUNCH BOATS



BACKGROUND

The purpose of this document is to provide direction and information about best practices for Minnesota charter (e.g. tour and fishing) and launch boat operators as they reopen and operate across the State of Minnesota in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. These guidelines do not apply to charter and cruise boats that have extensive indoor space and that provide full meal service; operators of those types of boats should consult the [Stay Safe Minnesota \(MN\) website](#) for guidance relevant to restaurants, and indoor and outdoor entertainment venues. This document was developed in consultation with several state agencies and private charter boat operators and is based on our current understanding of state and national guidance. These guidelines will:

- Protect the health and safety of customers, staff, and operators of charter boats and launches.
- Help operators provide services in a consistent and safe way.
- Provide consistent messaging so customers understand what to expect.

The guidelines in this document are minimum actions to operate during COVID-19. Individual operators are encouraged to develop and enact additional operational policies to address specific needs and operational constraints, as necessary. Additional direction may be provided from the following (see Resources section for applicable websites):

- Executive Orders
- Stay Safe MN website
- Outdoor Recreation Guidelines issued jointly by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- MDH and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) public health guidance

No operator is required to resume charter or launch operations. Operators will need to be ready to further adapt their operations, and even close them, if conditions or information changes and public health considerations warrant doing so.

GUIDELINES FOR OPERATORS

Operators must follow the guidelines below and ensure that social distancing, sanitation, and safety for customers and staff can be met.

Managing the safe operations of charter and launch boats

- 1. Required Preparedness Plan.** Before reopening, charter and launch operators must develop and implement a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan to manage exposure to the virus. Refer to the [Stay Safe Guidance for All Businesses](#) on [Stay Safe MN](#) and the [Department of Labor and Industry](#) website for updated templates and instructions.
- 2. Facility and amenity availability.** Facilities, amenities, and services, such as the following, may be available if it is possible for staff and customers to follow social distancing guidelines, and for staff to implement enhanced cleaning protocols and provide contact-free procedures. Operators may have to limit capacity or close some of these facilities/amenities:
 - Boat cabins, cuddies, or other enclosed spaces
 - Bathrooms
 - Fish cleaning stations and docks
 - Offices and contact stations
 - Rental/loaner recreational equipment
 - Tables and chairs

3. **Capacity limits.** Capacity should be limited to no more than the maximum number of people who can safely maintain an appropriate social distance of six feet, inclusive of both crew and passengers. If all patrons are members of the same immediate household, the charter or launch may be for the full legal load/capacity of the boat.
4. **Loading/Unloading.** Loading and unloading procedures must comply with all social distancing standards as outlined in MDH and CDC guidelines.

Managing interactions among customers and staff

1. **Customer transactions.** To the maximum extent possible, provide and encourage the use of online payments for handling boat reservations, state fishing licenses, fees, and any retail transactions or other purchases. This will reduce customer-staff physical interactions by eliminating required signatures, exchange of cash, etc.
2. **Staff training.** All staff must be trained in COVID-19 mitigation techniques including frequent and thorough hand washing, respiratory etiquette (e.g., covering coughs and sneezes), purpose and techniques for wearing masks, surface disinfecting, as well as other MDH and CDC social distancing and safety guidelines.
3. **Personal protective equipment.** Provide staff with personal protective equipment such as gloves, goggles, face shields, and face masks as appropriate for the activity being performed.
4. **Consistent information.** Operators should develop and deploy clear and consistent messaging to customers on social distancing, facility closures, building and boat capacity limits, and expectations for customer behavior. Operators should use this messaging when creating their own signage, posting information on websites, emailing customers, and in other communications with the public. Some helpful resources include the following:
 - [MDH Materials and Resources](#)
 - [CDC Communication Resources](#)
5. **Social distancing.** Owner/operators must put in place practices for adequate social distancing in confined areas such as cabins, cuddies, small holds, restrooms and breakrooms, and should develop signage and systems (e.g. flagging when occupied) to restrict occupancy when social distancing cannot be maintained in such areas. Passengers and crew members should avoid passing or sharing fishing rods to the maximum extent possible unless items are sanitized between users. Other



activities such as baiting hooks and netting fish should maintain adequate social distance.

6. **Signage.** Customer informational signage should be posted, where appropriate, to encourage the following:
 - Social distancing of six or more feet between individuals, in particular at locations where people tend to congregate.
 - Capacity limits for specific facilities within boats (restroom areas, cabins, etc.).
 - Sanitizing protocols for individuals to follow before and after using customer amenities and facilities.
 - Basic COVID-19 health guidelines, such as staying home when sick, covering coughs and sneezes, washing hands frequently, wearing a cloth face mask to protect others, and avoiding touching face.
7. **COVID-19 Screening.** Operators should screen all staff for COVID-19 prior to staff starting work duties. Screening should include all questions on the [MDH Visitor and Employee Health Screening Checklist](#), which is available on the [MDH website](#) in printable English, Hmong, Somali, and Spanish versions. Staff who have symptoms consistent with COVID-19, or who live with someone or have been in close contact with someone with symptoms consistent with COVID-19, should review CDC's [If You Are Sick or Caring for Someone](#) and should stay at home. Staff should consult [MDH guidelines](#) for when it is safe to return to work. Operators are encouraged to develop policies for screening visitors using the same questions and procedures and plan.

Managing new cleaning protocols

- Cleaning protocols.** Charter or launch operators must develop cleaning protocols based on MDH and CDC guidelines. In particular, reference [MDH Interim Guidance for Hotel Managers and Owners](#), [CDC's Guidance on Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#) and [CDC's Resources for Businesses and Workplaces](#).

In addition, charter and launch boat operators should:

- Visibly post general information about cleaning so customers know what to expect (e.g., restrooms will be open to customers and cleaned ## times per day).
 - Limit the sharing of equipment to the maximum extent possible and ensure frequent and thorough cleaning of equipment. For soft goods equipment that cannot be sanitized, allow at least 72 consecutive hours before reuse to allow for natural deactivation of the virus.
 - Conduct regular cleaning and disinfection at least after every trip as well as hourly touch-point sanitization during trips (e.g., workstations, equipment, screens, doorknobs, restrooms).
 - Provide and maintain hand hygiene stations on site, as follows:
 - **For handwashing:** soap, running warm water, and disposable paper towels.
 - **For sanitizer:** an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol for areas where handwashing facilities may not be available or practical.
- Specialized equipment.** All specialized equipment such as nets and gaffs may be only handled by crew, excepting that which is self-supplied by customer.
 - Fishing or other shared equipment.** Fishing equipment must be sanitized between uses by staff. Sharing should be limited to the extent possible.
 - Life jackets and related soft goods.** Life jackets and related soft goods (e.g. rain gear, seat cushions, etc.) must be sanitized between each use. Note that some soft goods may need up to 72-hours between uses to minimize risk. [See the Safe Boating Campaign](#) website for more information.

Guidelines for customers

Consistent messaging will help customers effectively plan and prepare for their visit. Charter and launch boat operators should ensure their customers receive this

information. Information distribution methods may include social media, news releases, e-mails sent to customers, on-site postings, among other methods.

When patronizing charter or launch boats, customers should follow these guidelines:

- Plan ahead.** When available, make reservations and purchase items online or by phone before you arrive on site. Cash-less and minimal-contact transactions are becoming a normal operating procedure in many places to avoid lines and person-to-person interactions. This will help protect you, other customers, and operator staff.
- Be self-sufficient.** Be prepared to be as self-contained and self-sufficient as possible. For example, bring your own soap, surface disinfectant supplies, and hand sanitizer. Consider bringing a lunch, snacks, and beverages from home.
- Socially distance yourself.** Passengers aboard charter and launch boats should maintain a distance of at least six feet from people not from their immediate household. Passengers should also use appropriate face coverings when social distancing measures are difficult to maintain and follow face covering guidelines issued by MDH ([MDH Guidance on When and How to Wear a Mask](#)) and the CDC. Note that cloth face coverings may help protect others from the wearer's respiratory droplets **but are NOT a replacement for social distancing**. Social distancing must be observed even if face coverings are in use.
- Follow the rules.** Follow all operator instructions, whether given in writing or verbally, that protect your safety and the safety of others. These instructions will likely include facility-specific direction about things such as:
 - Loading and unloading procedures
 - Equipment sharing rules
 - Social distancing guidelines
 - Other rules specific to the charter or launch operator
- Be well informed.**
 - Visit [Stay Safe MN](#) and [MDH guidelines](#) for information and tips to help keep yourself, your family, and the community healthy.
 - Visit the [Minnesota Department of Natural Resources website](#) for up-to-date Outdoor Recreation Guidelines.

Resources

MDH Materials and Resources – health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/index.html

MDH Coronavirus Disease 2019 Updates – www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html

CDC Communication Resources – www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html

State of Minnesota's Online Screening Tool – mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/if-sick/is-it-covid

MDH Interim Guidance for Hotel Managers and Owners – www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/lodgingcleaning.pdf

CDC's Guidance on Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility – www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html

CDC's Resources for Businesses and Workplaces – www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/businesses-employers.html

Safe Boating Campaign Website – safeboatingcampaign.com/news/covid-19-cleaning-and-storing-your-life-jacket/

Minnesota DNR and MDH Outdoor Recreation Guidelines – dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/covid-19-outdoor-recreation-guidelines.html

State of Minnesota Executive Orders – mn.gov/governor/news/executiveorders.jsp

Stay Safe MN – <https://staysafe.mn.gov/>

Information for Individuals and Families – <https://staysafe.mn.gov/individuals-families/index.jsp>

Information for Businesses and Organizations – <https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp>

US Coast Guard COVID-19 Information – www.uscg.mil/coronavirus

National Safe Boating Council Life Jacket Sanitation Recommendations – safeboatingcampaign.com/news/covid-19-cleaning-and-storing-your-life-jacket/

mn.gov/deed/guidance

